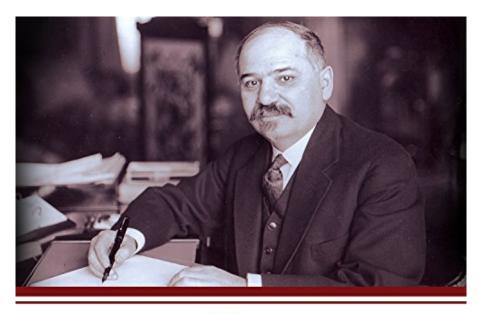




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The terror and purges of Stalin's Russia in the 1930s discouraged Soviet officials from leaving documentary records, let alone keeping personal diaries. A remarkable exception is the unique diary assiduously kept by Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to London between 1932 and 1943. This selection from Maisky's diary grippingly documents Britain's drift to war during the 1930s, appeasement in the Munich era, negotiations leading to the signature of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Churchill's rise to power, the German invasion of Russia, and the intense debate over the opening of the second front. Maisky was distinguished by his great sociability and access to the key players in British public life. Among his range of regular contacts were politicians, press barons, ambassadors, intellectuals, writers, and indeed royalty. His diary further reveals the role personal rivalries within the Kremlin played in the formulation of Soviet policy at the time. Scrupulously edited and checked against a vast range of Russian and Western archival evidence, this extraordinary narrative diary offers a fascinating revision of the events surrounding the Second World War.

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Maisky diaries, obligatory reading

By Larry Holmes

By Larry E. Holmes, October 14, 2015

The Maisky diaries, written by the Soviet Union's ambassador to London from 1932 to 1943, is obligatory reading for anyone interested in Soviet and British politics, diplomacy leading up to the outbreak of World War II, and the relationship between the USSR and Great Britain during the war. Gabriel Gorodetsky, a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, and emeritus professor of history at Tel Aviv University, has masterfully selected for this publication about one-fourth of the extended diary kept by Maisky. The author of acclaimed studies of Soviet foreign policy, Gorodetsky has provided throughout this volume critical context for developments covered by Maisky and for the ambassador's interpretation of them.

We learn from Maisky's account much about the political and diplomatic world in which he moved. The diaries provide new insights and information on the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the German invasion of the USSR, and the formation of the Grand Alliance. We also learn much of value about the personality of those with whom Maisky so frequently met. Maisky cultivated relations with many important people, including Churchill, Eden, Beaverbrook, Lloyd George, Joseph Kennedy (the US ambassador to London from 1938 to 1940), and Beatrice Webb. The diaries thereby emphasize over and again the significance of the individual—his or her knowledge, emotions, and idiosyncrasies. And we discover how Maisky's own

behavior defied the stereotype of the alternately aloof, boorish, then aggressive Soviet diplomat. The diaries also dismantle the notion that Soviet officials were devoid of humanity.

Maisky's telling of what he experienced and Gorodetsky's presentation of that story frequently make for dramatic reading. This book will be of interest to specialists and non-specialists alike.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Twenty-two years in the making, Gabriel Gorodetsky's latest tour ...

By Amazon Customer

Twenty-two years in the making, Gabriel Gorodetsky's latest tour de force is not to be missed. As articulated in the uniformly positive reviews to hit news stands over the last few weeks, The Maisky Diaires manages to do no less than "rewrite some history which we thought we knew."

Maisky's first hand account of the all important years 1932-1943 in the Court of St. James - by turns delightful, revealing, and shocking - complemented by Gorodetsky's characteristically comprehensive research and analysis and incisive commentary, is a quintessential page turner and will leave you wanting more.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Highly praised and well deserved

By Ronald Zweig

This work – a condensation of a three volume complete edition – has been reviewed in all the British press with such acclaim that I had to look for myself. The reviews are justified. Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, writes fluently not only about the diplomacy of the 1930s and the Second World War but also as the ultimate outsider (a Russian and a Communist) observing the British upper class in its incompetency and idiotic prejudices as it struggled to play a role in international affairs. Churchill, and the British public, saved Britain (and, for a while, the world) from the worst consequences of the politics of the British elites. This was a deadly serious matter to the Soviet Union, and Maisky was a keen observer of everything that took place in London during his 11 years there. Gabriel Gorodetsky has done a marvelous job in bringing this material to the English-language reading public with exactly the right editorial touch. Gorodetsky provides the necessary contexts and explanations while always allowing Maisky to speak for himself. This is a marvelous read and a real contribution to the historical writing on the 1930s and the war years.

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